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RETENTION OF STUDENTS OVER A THREE YEAR PERIOD (FALL SEMESTERS, 1962, 63, AND 64) UNDER THREE DIFFERENT DROP POLICIES.

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IN THREE CONSECUTIVE YEARS, 1962-65, RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE HAD THREE DIFFERENT POLICIES FOR STUDENT WITHDRAWALS FROM CLASS--(1) A 6-WEEK NO-PENALTY PERIOD, WITH THE GRADE ASSIGNED FOR WITHDRAWALS AFTER THAT PERIOD TO BE DETERMINED BY THE STUDENTS' PROGRESS UP TO THE DATE OF WITHDRAWAL, (2) A 6-WEEK NO-PENALTY PERIOD, WITH GRADES OF F FOR LATER WITHDRAWALS, EXCEPT IN "EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES," AND (3) NO-PENALTY PERIOD OF THREE WEEKS IN SOME CLASSES AND EIGHT WEEKS IN OTHERS, WITH A FAILING GRADE FOR LATER WITHDRAWALS, EXCEPT "UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES." A STUDY OF STARTING AND ENDING ENROLLMENTS DURING THE FALL SEMESTER OF EACH OF THE THREE YEARS INDICATES THAT RETENTION WAS BETTER UNDER THE FIRST OF THESE POLICIES. THE AUTHOR SUGGESTS THAT (1) THE PURPOSE OF THE PENALTY GRADE SYSTEM, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF AN EARLY COMMITMENT BY THE STUDENT, WAS NOT ACHIEVED, AND (2) APPLICATION OF THE FIRST OF THESE POLICIES WOULD RESULT IN FEWER STUDENT FAILURES AND MORE FUNDS FROM STATE APPORTIONMENT. (WO)

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RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE

COUNSELING DIVISION

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BY EVAN VAIL

SPRING, 1966

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
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RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE
Counseling Division

Retention of Students Over a Three Year Period (Fall Semesters, 1962, '63 and '64) Under Three Different Drop Policies

By Evan Vail

Spring, 1966

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of three different "Drop Policies" on the retention of students. Theoretically, the only variable is the drop policy, but of course there are always many other variables which affect student retention. Most of them are difficult to isolate and measure. For example, a variable which is undoubtedly affecting student retention during the current year, 1965-66, is the war in Viet Nam with its attendant increasing draft quotas, appeal for voluntary enlistments, tightening of student deferment policy, etc. This variable is affecting student retention in two ways. Some students are dropping out to fulfill their service obligation; others are staying in school to postpone it. Nevertheless, the three year period, 1962, '63, '64, was a fairly stable one in most respects concerning student retention variables.

During the 1962-63 school year, the drop period during which all courses could be dropped without penalty (i.e. course would not appear on permanent record) was six weeks from the beginning of the semester. Courses dropped after the sixth week were assigned WS, WD or WF grades by the instructors, depending upon the student's progress in the individual course up to the time of withdrawal.

For the 1963-64 school year the six week drop period was retained, but students who dropped individual courses after the sixth week were normally given F grades in that course. Extenuating circumstances surrounding the drop permitted the instructor to assign a WS, WD, or WF grade.

During the 1964-65 school year some of the courses had a three week drop period while others had an eight week drop period. Dropping a class after the drop deadline (either 3 or 8 week) would result in a WF grade for the course except under special circumstances.

All three of the above "Free-Drop Period Policies" and their attendant grade penalties has its rationale. It is not the purpose of this study to debate the merits of each plan, but rather to see if the retention of students was affected positively or negatively by each of the three policies.

RETENTION OF STUDENTS (1962, '63, '64

UNDER THREE DIFFERENT DROP POLICIES

TABLE

	Starting Enrollment	Ending Enrollment (includes all grades	No Penalty Drops	WS	WD	WF	F	Ending Enrollment (Minus WS, WD, WF)	Ending Enrollment (A,B,C,D, grades-Minus WS,WD,WF,F
Fall, 1962-63 (3 week)	3738	3177 (85%)	561 (15%)	129 (3%)	34 (1%)	112 (3%)	303 (8%)	2902 (78%)	2599 (70%)
" " " (8 week)	4390	3671 (84%)	719 (16%)	142 (3%)	71 (2%)	115 (3%)	376 (9%)	3343 (76%)	2967 (68%)
" " " (Totals)	8128	6848 (84%)	1280 (16%)	271 (3%)	105 (1%)	227 (3%)	679 (8%)	6245 (77%)	5566 (68%)
Fall, 1963-64 (3 week)	2830	2419 (85%)	411 (15%)	75 (3%)	13 (0%)	31 (1%)	340 (12%)	2300 (81%)	1960 (69%)
" " " (8 week)	5267	4115 (78%)	1152 (22%)	130 (2%)	45 (1%)	37 (1%)	588 (11%)	3903 (74%)	3315 (63%)
" " " (Totals)	8097	6534 (81%)	1563 (19%)	205 (3%)	58 (1%)	68 (1%)	928 (11%)	6203 (77%)	5275 (65%)
Fall, 1964-65 (3 week)	3512	3108 (88%)	404 (12%)	173 (5%)	1 (0%)	271 (8%)	347 (10%)	2663 (76%)	2316 (66%)
" " " (8 week)	5721	4398 (77%)	1314 (23%)	110 (2%)	1 (0%)	114 (2%)	521 (9%)	4173 (73%)	3652 (64%)
" " " (Totals)	9233	7506 (81%)	1727 (19%)	283 (3%)	2 (0%)	385 (4%)	868 (9%)	6836 (74%)	5968 (65%)
Fall, 1962 (Totals)	25,458	20,888 (82%)	4,570 (18%)	759 (3%)	165 (1%)	680 (3%)	3,155 (12%)	19,284 (76%)	16,809 (66%)

Procedure and Explanation of the Column Headings on the Table

Starting enrollment figures for each course (excluding physical education were obtained from the report each instructor submitted to the president of the college. This report titled, "Teacher's Schedule Card" indicates the number of students in each class as of Friday at the end of the first week of the semester. No doubt there are inaccuracies in those figures. One instructor might report the number according to the official original data processing list--in which case students who enrolled but never attended would be counted; another instructor might conscientiously include only the students who actually appeared in class. However, it might be assumed that those instructors who reported attendance in the former fashion would continue to do so for the three year period; the same might be assumed for the latter group of instructors. The original class listings (on yellow sheets) from data processing were not used because complete records were not available.

Ending enrollment figures were taken from data processing lists filed in the Admission's Office. WS, WD and WF grades were included in the figures because they are an important part of the picture. The WD and WF grades are treated exactly the same as D and F final grades at RCC in regard to units attempted and grade points earned, but some colleges and universities treat them as ordinary W grades (i.e. no units attempted, no grade points earned).

The column, "No Penalty Drops" includes students who withdrew from college or were dropped by instructors before the drop deadlines. It also encompasses students who withdrew from individual courses within the drop period.

The WS, WD and WF columns include students who withdrew from individual courses after their drop deadline, students who withdrew from college after drop deadlines, and students who were dropped by their instructors after the drop deadline. During 1964-65 the WD grade was eliminated; nevertheless, four WD's somehow got recorded.

It was essential to have a column showing F grades because during the 1963-64 year the F grade was the penalty grade given if a course was dropped by a student or if a student was dropped by an instructor after the 6 week drop period.

The last two columns are self-explanatory; the first one includes only A, B, C, D, and F grades while the last one includes only passing grades (A,B,C, and D). The last column is really a "success" symbol and is the most important one to consider when making judgments about the retention of students under three different drop policies (one reason being the manipulation of the F grade during 1963-64).

All percentages shown are percentages of the "Starting Enrollment."

Notice that while we had both three and eight week drop periods only during 1964-65, it was essential to separate courses into these two categories for the preceding two years in order to make valid comparisons.

The discrepancy in starting enrollments between 1962-63 and 1963-64 (it looks as though enrollment dropped) may be attributed to three factors: (1) A disproportionate number of instructors did not report starting enrollment figures to the president during 1963-64; (2) Psychology 49 was a required freshman course in 1962-63 and was an elective course in subsequent years; (3) The average number of units (and hence, courses) each student carried dropped during 1963-64.

Conclusions

1. Retention of students was best under the six week drop period that did not penalize students (mandatory F or WF grade) for dropping courses or being dropped by instructor after the drop period. This conclusion is based upon the figures in the last two columns. Keep in mind the double use of the F grade during 1963-64. It meant both failure at the end of the course and a penalty grade for dropping or being dropped after the deadline. When Psychology 49 courses are removed from the statistics the retention picture for the 1962-63 year looks even better. For example, the starting enrollment for 17 sections of Psychology 49 that year was 1511. The ending enrollment was 852 (56%) and the no penalty drops, 659 (44%). During 1962-63, Psychology 49 ran for fourteen weeks and was required. Since then it has run for six weeks, is optional, and retention has been better. It is in the 3 week drop category of courses.

   An interesting sidelight to the figures in the last column is that in 1962-63 sixty five percent of students who completed English 1A (largest 3 week drop course) received a C or better while 35% received a D or F (W grades not being included). For 1964-65 the respective figures were seventy and thirty percent.

2. The apparent better retention of the three-week drop courses (against the eight week) during 1964-65 is largely illusory. By comparing the two categories in the last column for the years 1962-63 and 1964-65 one can see that two percent more of the three week drop courses were completed successfully than were the eight week drop courses for <u>both</u> years. At the same time WF grades for the three week group increased from 3% in 1962-63 to 8% in 1964-65 and F grades from 8% to 10%. For the eight week group, WF's decreased from 3% to 2% and F's were 9% for both years. As one might expect "No Penalty Drops" decreased for the three week group from 15% to 12% while they increased for the eight week group from 16% to 23%. A shorter drop period for the former and a longer one for the latter is an obvious explanation, but the counseling staff, who

approve all dropped and added courses, reports that during the period from the third to the eighth week, eight week drop courses are sometimes dropped in preference to the three week courses because of the penalty element, even though students are doing satisfactory work in the eight week courses and unsatisfactory work in the three week courses. A uniform drop period for all courses would eliminate the necessity for this sort of decision.

3. Riverside City College would probably obtain more state money based upon A.D.A. if they returned to the 1962-63 drop policy for three reasons:

   (1) There was a higher percentage retention of students who completed the semester.
   (2) There were slightly fewer W and F grades given in 1962-63 than in the other two years. Students who earn W and F grades are probably not present for the second census week period.
   (3) There were three percent fewer (16% vs. 19%) "No Penalty Drops" during 1962-63 than in the other two years; hence more students would be present during the first census week (usually the fourth week).

4. There should be a systematic and accurate system for obtaining starting enrollment figures for each course offered. This figure should be based upon actual enrollment in courses after "Drop and Add Day" and "Late, Late Registration." It should not include students who registered but never attended. Probably Friday for the first week is a useful date for this purpose. Other statistics and administrative decisions could be based upon these more meaningful figures.

5. One of the reasons for the F and WF penalty grades for courses dropped after the prescribed period was to try for an early commitment on the part of the student toward his study list. It was felt that the student would be encouraged to maintain his courses throughout the semester and not drop them when the going got tough. It may be that the need for this artificial prod (which apparently was not effective) has been replaced by federal rules concerning the draft and G.I. bill—at least for the male students. Students who want to maintain their student deferments must carry 30 semester units per year; former servicemen who want full subsistance allotments must carry 14 units per semester.